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## Viewing cable 09PANAMA877, Panama: Colombian Cross-Border Offer Sows Doubt and

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09PANAMA877**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09PANAMA877	2009-12-11 19:22	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Panama

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/26/112845/cables-offer-dim-view-of-president.html>

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OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHZP #0877/01 3451922  
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O R 111922Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0175  
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RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 0038  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA  
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE  
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
RUEHTG/AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA 0036  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
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S E C R E T PANAMA 000877

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2034/12/11

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SUBJECT: Panama: Colombian Cross-Border Offer Sows Doubt and  
Confusion in GOP

REF: PANAMA 639; PANAMA 699; PANAMA 799

CLASSIFIED BY: Gilmour David, DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

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¶1. (S//NF) A Colombian offer, which appears to have been accepted by President Martinelli, to mount a cross-border operation against FARC forces in Panama's Darien province has caused confusion among the GOP's senior security team and raised concern about coordination with USG efforts in that region. The Ambassador has notified GOP leaders that a Colombian raid would have serious negative consequences for U.S. security cooperation in Darien. End summary.

Colombian Cross-Border Operation?

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¶2. (S//NF) Vice President/Foreign Minister Juan Carlos Varela called Ambassador on December 9 to express his concern over discussions within the GOP about a possible cross-border operation by Colombian forces directed against the FARC 57th Front in Darien, Panama. Varela related details of a December 9 meeting between visiting Colombian National Police director General Oscar Naranjo, President Martinelli, and senior GOP security officials, in which Naranjo offered to direct Colombian forces to move over the holidays against FARC units in Darien. Although Martinelli expressed a willingness to approve the plan, Varela was concerned that it was not coordinated with Embassy Panama's DEA-led operation in Darien, about which Varela has been briefed.

¶3. (S//NF) The next day (December 10), Ambassador, DCM and PolSec officer met Varela, Minister of the Presidency Jimmy Papadimitriu and Minister of Government and Justice Jose Raul Mulino for a previously scheduled lunch. Varela reiterated his concern about the Colombian proposal and insisted that there must be a coordinated plan between Panama, the U.S. and Colombia.

Too Good to be True

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¶4. (S//NF) In a sidebar conversation with Ambassador and DCM, Papadimitriu expressed misgivings about Colombian motivations, saying that some aspects of Naranjo's proposal "didn't add up." Naranjo told the group that the GOC had twice offered to the Torrijos administration to mount such a cross-border operation, but that Torrijos had refused. Papadimitriu said both he and Martinelli were puzzled that Torrijos had refused, and they wondered whether Torrijos had a good reason for doing so. Papadimitriu noted that Naranjo had enthusiastically touted President Uribe's leadership repeatedly in the conversation, and he wondered out loud whether the proposed operations was more for Colombian domestic political purposes than for security.

Two Plans are Too Many  
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15. (S//NF) The Ambassador reminded the ministers (reftels) that the Embassy has been working for several months to mount a DEA-led operation to take down key FARC drug trafficking figures, and a DEA FAST team recently arrived at post to initiate planning. That effort is part of our larger Darien strategy of denying safehaven to the FARC and DTOs in the Darien, which is supported with extensive resources from DoD, State, and other agencies. The Ambassador told the ministers that we would have no choice but to suspend our planned operations in the face of an uncoordinated action by the Colombians, because it would be unsafe for USG law enforcement to conduct operations in such an environment. She observed that such a suspension would be widely noted throughout many agencies of the USG.

Law Enforcement Means

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16. (S//NF) The Ambassador pointed out SOUTHCOM's view that a military assault against the FARC in Panama would be a violation of international law, given that the FARC is not engaged in a recognized insurgency against the government of Panama. She made clear that a cross-border assault of the type that Colombia has conducted against other neighbors would likely cause SOUTHCOM to withdraw its support from the Darien, leaving Panama without vital training resources for its frontier police.

You're Right!

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17. (S//NF) All three ministers said emphatically that a Colombian military-style attack would be disastrous for Panama, and that Martinelli would not knowingly approve such an action. Mulino said he would seek a meeting with his Colombian counterparts to clarify their intentions.

Alfaro Again

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18. (S//NF) The Ambassador also reiterated her strong concern over the continued antagonistic attitude of Olmedo Alfaro, Secretary General of the Council of Public Security and National Defense (the GOP intelligence agency), who has repeatedly expressed his hostility toward DEA and other USG agencies (reftels). The Ambassador noted that Alfaro was making an effort to insert himself into Darien with the intention of disrupting USG operations, and she warned that DEA and others would not continue to operate in Darien if Alfaro is involved on the GOP side. She noted that the Embassy is prepared to work around Alfaro, as we have done with problematic figures in past governments, and that we have devoted considerable effort over the past few months to develop serviceable work-arounds.

Comment

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¶9. (S//NF) Embassy Panama is deeply concerned about this turn of events. A Colombian cross-border attack would not serve U.S. interests in Panama, and would cause grave damage to our long term security cooperation. An attack would hand a propaganda victory to Hugo Chavez, who would claim the attack was launched from a U.S. base in Colombia. It would be unpopular with the Panamanian public and would arouse deep-seated Panamanian mistrust of Colombia and its intentions. It would reinvigorate the anti-American left in Panama who would inevitably see a nefarious USG hand behind the action. The resulting public outcry would surely cause a nervous GOP to restrict security cooperation, negatively impacting the permissive operating environment that USG law enforcement currently enjoys.

¶10. (S//NF) In the short term, a cross-border operation would almost certainly scuttle the DEA-led operation which is central to the success of our Darien Section 1207 strategy. For now, we are proceeding with meetings between the Embassy's Darien working group and SENAFRONT to develop a common picture of threats in the Darien. The next step will be a concept of operations which we will review in detail with the GOP as part of the process of weighing risks and benefits. In the absence of any coherent GOP structure for reviewing security strategy, President Martinelli's tendency to glibly say yes to any proposal by a government he sees as an ideological ally adds an additional layer of complexity and unpredictability.

STEPHENSON